



TURKISH POSTAL HISTORY: The Ottoman Era



Determining The First Use Of Latin Alphabet On Stamps

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The history of Republic of Türkiye goes back to year 1299 with the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. The language of the Empire was Ottoman Turkish, standing on the Arabic alphabet, and not to anyone's surprise, the stamps issued also in Arabic letters (image no.1). Yet, at one point in time the Empire started using the Latin alphabet on its stamps. Here, we will go back in time to determine when and why the Ottoman Empire choose to introduce the Latin alphabet on its stamps.

Republic of Türkiye, back in the day as known as the Ottoman Empire, issued its first adhesive stamp “Tughra”, as the 2nd independent country in Asia, in 1863. The emblem of sovereignty, tughra, of the current ruler Sultan Abdulaziz over a crescent bearing the inscription in Ottoman Turkish “Devlet-i Aliye Osmaniye (The Sublime Ottoman Empire)” was captured on the stamp (image no.2). Later the “Crescent and Star” series of stamps issued in 1865 (image no.3), also known with the name of the crafter Duloz”, and until “the issue of Empire series of stamps (image no.4), in 1876, Latin letters were never used on Ottoman stamps. The Latin alphabet was first used with the Empire series not because the use of Arabic letters were left, but rather because the stamps were issued following the entry of Ottoman Empire to Universal Postal Union, which was established in 1874, as a result of the postal communication and the items being carried between countries expanded, a documented understanding between the participating countries to continue providing postal services outside of their territory with none to minimum disruption and to be paid accordingly, become a necessity. Nonetheless, the use of Latin alphabet yet to come to act in November 1, 1928 (image no.5), way later following the regime change to Republic.



Size increase: Img.#2: %110 — Img.#3i: %131—Img.#3ii: -%70 - Img.#4: %142 - Img.#5: %212.5—Img.#6: %93—Img.#7: %19.5

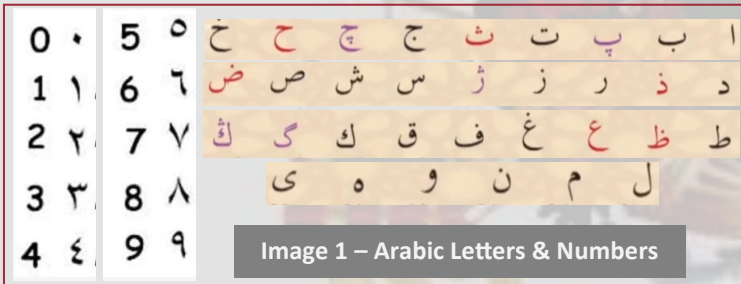


Image 1 – Arabic Letters & Numbers

In year 1881 the Empire series design was revised to include four different languages; Turkish, French, Greek and Bulgarian using four different alphabets; Arabic, Latin, Greek and Cyrillic, to be used in Eastern Rumelia provinces of Ottoman Empire (image no.6).



Yet even before the Rumelia stamps that carrying the Latin alphabet were issued, there were local stamps used in the city of Constantinople (today known as Istanbul—back in the day had many different names), the capital of many Empires; Eastern Roman, Latin and Ottoman. Following the conquer of the city by Ottomans’ the emperor invited the non-Muslims back promising their belongings will be returned and can leverage the tax benefits for merchants, if they choose to do so, within the given period of time. Many merchants returned and continued their business, this let city to have a cosmopolite environment where people from different ethnicities and cultures lived in peace together.

The Arabic letters and Rumi calendar being used in the Ottoman Empire was nothing similar to the Gregorian calendar and the Latin alphabet that the non-Muslims were used to, and It did not take long to cause issues, in where non-Muslim people heavily populated. The postmen were having a hard time addressing the deliveries, which were written in Latin alphabet, especially in the capital, Constantinople. As a result, the Postal Administration decided a separate local postal system to be set up, to overcome the challenge the postmen faced, daily.

The privilege of operating the first Local postal system was granted to Lianos Efendi under a 6-year contract starting from December 1865, with a will of Sultan Abdülaziz, on 9 August, 1865. Lianos Efendi quickly organized a separate team in Constantinople for local postal system under his company Liannos et Cie (“Liannos”) to distribute the mail arriving the city which was not addressed in Arabic letters. Yet the services of the Lianos et Cie (a.k.a. private city post) was limited with the city of Constantinople. Liannos was charging each piece of mail a price based on the distance from the city center. To manage these charges, the local post used special stamps printed in the Autumn of 1865 by Perkins Bacon of London with three denominations; 5 Para (in blue color), 20 Para (in green color), and 40 Paras (in pink color) with the words ‘Poste Locale’ in French on one side, and ‘City Post’ in Turkish (‘Şehir Postası’) on the opposite side (Image no.7), along with a crescent and a star in the middle (the star and crescent is a prominent symbol of the Ottoman Empire, and a recognized symbol of Islam), used both for letters and the newspapers (Image no.8), mostly observed as perforated 14, even though there are also imperforated ones known to exists. Today the plates of these Liannos stamps are secured by the Royal Philatelic Society, in London.



Image 7 – Local Post stamps of Liannos et Cie, 1865



Image 8 – Liannos seal used on newspapers